



Testimony before the Committee on Judiciary

**LD 1614 An Act To Require an Ultrasound and Certain Counseling Before an Abortion**

May 5, 2023

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Committee:

I am Rev. Jane Field, a resident of Portland, an ordained Presbyterian (PCUSA) minister, and the Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches, an ecumenical coalition of seven member-denominations (Episcopal, Lutheran (ELCA), Presbyterian (PCUSA), Quaker, Unitarian Universalist, United Methodist and United Church of Christ) who represent 437 local congregations in Maine with 55,000 members in their care. The Maine Council of Churches **opposes** LD 1614.

I am likely not the only Christian you will hear from. And while I respect the right of those Christians who oppose this bill to represent *their* interpretation of Christianity, let me be perfectly clear: *their* interpretation is not mine, nor is it that of the Maine Council of Churches. And their views about abortion are not the only conclusions thoughtful people of faith can reach. My own denomination, for example, has advocated for reproductive justice since 1970, *before* Roe v. Wade, understanding the termination of a pregnancy to be a matter of a careful ethical decision by the patient, in consultation with medical professionals, that should not be restricted by law.

A majority of Christians here in Maine and across the United States believe abortion should be safe and legal, and in recent years, we at the Council of Churches have consistently advocated in the Maine state legislature for protecting the right of people in Maine to access reproductive health care that includes abortion. We affirm the ability of pregnant people to make good moral decisions and believe the decision to end a pregnancy can be a moral decision.

Abortion is a complex health care and moral issue requiring sensitive medical, ethical and spiritual discernment in each unique situation. We take seriously the complexities of specific lives and circumstances and honor the dignity and agency of pregnant people. We appreciate the need for nuance and humility when considering the moral agency of others, and believe that what we, as people of faith, have to offer our world is not a set of simplistic answers to life's difficult questions—rather, we are called to offer compassion, mercy, and advocacy for access to health care, including reproductive health care, as a basic human right.

Six of the Protestant denominations who are members of the Maine Council of Churches have explicit pro-reproductive justice stances in their policies. Judaism is clear in its interpretation of Hebrew scripture: a fetus does not have the status of a human life or personhood (Exodus 21: 22-25). The bible (neither Hebrew nor Christian scripture) hardly speaks anything straightforward into the intensely personal realm of when human life begins or what decisions should be made in complicated, real-world situations involving pregnancy or abortion.

And no one religion's doctrines about abortion belong in state or federal law. The U.S. Constitution prohibits the establishment of a state religion, and our laws should not favor one faith tradition's interpretation over any other tradition's, including when it comes to abortion. The teachings about abortion of faith traditions such as evangelical or Roman Catholic Christianity should not become law, for example. That would favor one religion over others and that is unconstitutional. If access to abortion care remains safe and legal, a matter of moral,

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medical, and spiritual discernment made by a pregnant person and their doctor, there would be no prohibition for an evangelical Christian or Roman Catholic person (or anyone else) to decide *not* to have an abortion. However, if their faith traditions' doctrines were the law of the land, the rest of us would be prohibited from exercising our own moral agency based on *our* religious traditions' belief that deciding *to* have an abortion can be a moral decision.

Ultimately, neither we, as “the Church,” nor any other religion, nor you, as the government, have the wisdom or authority or medical expertise to decide what is best for a pregnant person in a specific situation. Our state laws should protect the privacy of those who are pregnant so that they can make those decisions in consultation with their medical care provider and in the light of their own spiritual practice. With access to safe, quality health care that includes the option of abortion, they will be empowered to build the lives and families they envision, to decide when and whether to parent, and to be able to receive necessary medical procedures from their own physicians whom they know and trust.

The anti-abortion bills coming before the 131<sup>st</sup> legislature are part of a backlash to the success of reproductive rights legislation here in Maine and are aimed at decreasing access to abortion while increasing the stigma of judgment and shame that some wish to place on women making legal and ethical decisions for their own reproductive health care.

LD 1614 would seek to force medical professionals to perform a procedure that has no basis in medical science. Facts are important, especially when discussing the health of Maine's women. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has deemed that an ultrasound prior to an abortion is medically unnecessary. This procedure serves only to create an undue burden for women attempting to access safe legal abortion care and is yet another example of attempts to shame women who seek an abortion by adding testing that has nothing to do with the procedure to terminate a pregnancy. This bill is a thinly veiled attempt to infringe on a woman's right to choose a legal medical procedure, as well as to stigmatize and judge those who choose it.

Yet, politicians are pushing legislation to require physicians to perform the procedure and to require patients to undergo medically unnecessary treatment. Such unfounded legislative mandates represent dangerous political interference and compromise patient care. Neither politicians (nor church leaders) should be in the business of enforcing this kind of mandate.

We at the Maine Council of Churches believe in trusting in pregnant people and their medical teams to make private medical decisions without interference from politicians (and without interference from religious traditions they do not practice).

For all these reasons, the Maine Council of Churches urges you to vote “Ought NOT To Pass” on LD 1614.